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ABSTRACT

A study determined if there was a correlation between reading achievement of children in grade two and the amount of time they spent watching television. Thirteen second-grade students responded to a survey given to determine the number of hours they spent reading and the number of hours they watched television over a three-week period. The number of hours spent watching television was correlated with their reading achievement scores. An analysis of the results indicated that the number of hours spent watching television did not negatively affect reading achievement. (One table of data is included; 28 references, the questionnaire, and a table of data are attached.) (Author/RS)

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Television's Effect on Reading Habits of Second Grade Students

by

Helena L. Nolan

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Presented to Kean College of New Jersey in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts Reading Specialist

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ABSTRACT

This study was undertaken to determine if there was a correlation between reading achievement of children in grade two and the amount of time they spent watching television. It was hypothesized that the correlation would be non-significant.

Thirteen second grade students responded to a survey given to determine the number of hours they spent reading and the number of hours they watched television over a three week period. The number of hours spent watching televison was correlated with their reading achievement scores. An analysis of the results indicated that the number of hours spent watching television did not negatively effect reading achievement.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

		Page
I.	Abstract	i
II.	List of Tables	iii
III.	Television's Effect on Reading Habits of Second Grade Students	
	Introduction	1
	Statement of Problem	5
	Hypothesis	6
	Significance of Problem	6
	Purpose of the Study	6
	Assumptions	6
	Limitations	7
	Definitions	7
	Procedures	7
	Results	8
	Conclusions	10
IV.	Related Research	11
V.	References	22
VI.	Appendices	
	A. Questionnaire	24
	B. Data	26

LIST OF TABLES

Table		Page
I	Mean, Standard Deviation, and Correlation of Reading Comprehension Scores and Average Hours of TV Viewing	9

Television has had a tremendous influence on the lives of most Americans. It provides information and entertainment, and has been praised for its documentaries. It provides companionship. The behaviorist B.F. Skinner recommends it as a way to alleviate intellectual stress and to develop creativity for the elderly. (Guthrie 1983)

Television, a powerful socializer, is now in ninety-six percent of American homes; twenty-five percent have two. Estimates vary as to how many hours per week a child watches television, but the average set is on over six hours a day. By the age of seven, ninety-four percent of all children are regular television viewers. Children between the ages of six and eleven watch television an average of three and a half hours a day. By age eighteen, the average youth will have spent the equivalent of two and half uninterrupted years watching television - forty-five percent more than he or she has spent in classroom education. (Finn 1980)

It is estimated that one-quarter of a child's waking hours up to the age of 18 is spent watching television (Bourne 1979). Lesser (1977) found that first graders averaged 22 to 24 hours per week; sixth graders averaged 30 to 31 hours per week; and tenth graders averaged 26 to 28 hours per week.

Busch (1978) found that second and third graders watched 30 to 35 hours of television a week. Students in grades four,

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five, and six averaged 14 to 21 hours a week. However, thirty percent of those fourth, fifth, and sixth graders stated that they watched television an average of 50 hours a week. Browne (1981) found that black children viewed even greater amounts of television. Twenty-six percent of the students who were questioned reported that they watched more than sixty-four hours of television weekly.

The Ninth Annual Gallup Poll of the Public's Attitudes toward the Public Schools found that the average child, 12 years old or younger, spends two hours per day, including school days, viewing television, 30 minutes reading material which is not schoolwork, and 45 minutes doing homework.

By the time a child graduates from high school, it is estimated that 15,000 hours will have been spent watching television. Time spent watching television exceeds that of every activity except sleeping. (Wagner 1980)

Clearly, if a child is watching television, his attention is drawn to the screen and he is involved in little else. According to Guthrie (1983), cognitive learning processes are turned off when television is turned on. The time taken away from other activities is evident. As the study by Ninth Annual Gallop Poll indicates, the average child watches television for two hours a day while reading for only thirty minutes a day. This represents a fourfold increase of watching television over reading.

Interest has recently been focused on the relationship between reading habits and reading achievement. Is television taking the place of reading? How does television influence achievement?

In a study by Schramm (1961) elementary students with the highest reading scores were the heaviest television watchers. Schramm also found that television helped low achievers develop vocabulary skills. Busch (1976) agreed with Schramm's findings.

Lehr (1981) found that watching television affected the development of reading skills, and that extensive television viewing resulted in negative student attitudes toward reading. Freeman-Towner (1981) agreed with Lehr. She found that students who viewed moderate amounts of television had consistently higher achievement scores. Hornick (1975) maintained that television viewing had no effect on achievement in the content areas, but there was a negative relationship between television viewing and growth of long-term reading skills.

Television is not all bad, however. Like reading, television expands a child's horizon and broadens his/her experiences. The child is introduced to events and experiences in the world. Men walking on the moon, the crumbling of the Berlin Wall, and the end of communism in Russia have all been shown on television. Children learn to

develop a sense of history, a link with the past, through programs. The child can think about what he has seen and evaluate these experiences in terms of his present day world. Out of this increased interaction with the environment comes a surer intellectual grasp. Although younger children interpret these experiences differently from older children, they still have meaning for them. (Cronbach)

Lesser (1973) asserted that it is television's great power to transport and show the world to children, to display people, events, and ideas they would never encounter before. Crime, delinquency, poverty, war, and other problems are graphically depicted on television. This gives children the opportunity to develop values accordingly.

The results of these many studies are varied. Some studies suggest that children in the early primary grades were less interested in watching television than older children. These younger children have just acquired the skill of reading and are fascinated by reading as a new experience. Instead of watching television, these young children prefer to read. As the children grow older and either become frustrated or disinterested with reading, they increase their viewing time. This is especially true of low ability students who find reading a frustrating experience.

Other studies found heavy viewers are also heavy readers. Both activities represent different needs and interests and one activity does not necessarily replace the other.

Still other studies suggested that television does not displace reading, but in fact, serves as a stimulation to reading. Students are stimulated to read about programs they have seen on television. The term, tie-in, is used to describe films or programs adapted from literature. Teachers and librarians report that these tie-ins are among the most popular books to students.

There are studies which have found that television viewing takes up time which might otherwise be devoted to reading, and other studies which suggest that this does not occur at all. The findings from these studies are conflicting, demonstrating a need for more research in order to assess the impact of television on reading habits.

Statement of the Problem

Since a great deal of a child's life is occupied by watching television, a determination of whether a significant relationship between the number of hours spent watching television and reading achievement of second grade students exists will add to the literature on this topic.

Hypothesis

For the purpose of this study it was hypothized that there is a non-significant correlation between reading achievement of children in grade two and the amount of time spent viewing television.

Significance of the Problem

There are studies which have found that television viewing takes up time which might otherwise be devoted to reading, and other studies which suggest that this does not occur at all. The findings from these studies are conflicting, demonstrating a need for more research in order to assess the impact of television on reading habits.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study is to determine if television affects the reading habits of second grade students. The specific aim of the study is to learn if second grade students read instead of watching television, watch television instead of reading, or didn't displace one activity with the other.

Assumptions

It is assumed that the children will respond honestly to the questions on the questionnaire.

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Limitations of the Study

The study was limited to investigating the habits of second graders only. The instrument was a simple checklist and not a standardized tool against which norms could be measured.

Definitions of Terms

Reading habits: refers to the reading behaviors of children outside the classroom, pleasure or leisure reading that is unconnected to school or homework.

Tie-in: books that have inspired television programs, such as, Little House on the Prairie.

Procedure

A questionnaire was developed and distributed to twenty second grade students to determine the number of hours they watch television, their favorite television programs, how many hours a week they read, their favorite books, and if they would rather watch television than read a book. The students were required to keep a log of each day's television viewing for three weeks to establish the number of hours spent watching television and reading. The number of hours/minutes recorded each day was confirmed by parents who were asked to cooperate in ensuring accuracy. The number of hours spent watching television was correlated with reading achievement scores on the California Test of Basic Skills (CTBS).

Results

Thirteen second grade students participated in the study on the effects of television viewing on reading achievement. The data analysis was generated from reading comprehension scores on the California Test of Basic Skills (CTBS) and from the average number of hours per week the subjects watched television over a three week period.

The data collected showed that the students watched television an average of one hundred forty hours a week. The number of hours of television viewing ranged from four hours to seventeen hours a week. Thirty-eight percent of the students watched television less than ten hours a week, while sixty-two percent of the students watched ten or more hours a week. Boys and girls watched approximately the same amount of television a week (boys - 74 hours, girls - 66 hours). The data indicated that the subjects preferred to watch situation comedies and cartoons over other programs. The top three shows preferred were: Full House, Saved by the Bell, and The Simpsons.

The subjects spent an average of fifty-three hours a week reading. Sixty-two percent of the subjects indicated that they read less than five hours a week, while thirty-eight percent read five or more hours a week. Boys read an average of twenty-seven hours a week and girls read an average of 26 hours a week. A wide range of books were

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listed as favorites by the subjects. Some of the books, books mentioned, for example, Little House on the Prairie, Home Alone, Beauty and the Beast, and The Little Mermaid can be also be seen as a movie or television show. This may stimulate interest in reading the book.

The survey also indicated that ten of the thirteen children preferred watching television to reading a book, eight of the thirteen children preferred playing Nintendo to watching television, eight of the thirteen children preferred helping their mothers to watching television, and all of the children preferred playing with their friends to watching television.

As seen in Table I the mean reading achievement of the

Table I

Mean, Standard Deviation, and Correlation of Survey Results of Reading Comprehension and Average Hours of Television Viewing.

	M	SD	r
Comprehension	69.08	21.29	-.09
Average Hours TV Viewing	10.77	4.40	

sample is 69.08. The mean number of hours of television viewing is 10.77 hours per child. The correlation between reading achievement and television viewing is -.09.

Conclusions

A comparison of the data with the hypothesis that there would be no significant correlation between reading achievement and hours spent watching television shows that the hypothesis is supported since the correlation was negligible. The slight negative correlation is insignificant and indicates that watching television for the average number of hours this sample spent does not correlate with reading achievement.

Although this study did not show television viewing to have a negative or positive effect on reading achievement, further research should be done to provide additional data in determining if such an effect does exist. Research does indicate that parents should be aware of the conflicting evidence. Research also indicates that parents can help develop good viewing habits by guiding program selection and encouraging leisure reading. Teachers could use television viewing as a learning device by preparing activities which guide students in using different reading skills.

RELATED RESEARCH

There have been many studies investigating the effects of television on reading habits. The findings of these studies, however, have been inconsistent and often contradictory. The studies have found different results for children of different age levels, grade levels, and ability levels. Some studies have found that television significantly reduces reading time, while other studies have found that it does not. Still other studies have suggested that rather than television depressing interest in books, it serves as a stimulus to reading, particularly when the books are tie-ins with television shows.

In 1961 Wilbur Schramm conducted a classic study of 6,000 children, some of whom had never watched television. Schramm found that elementary school children with the highest grades in school were also those who watched the most television. Schramm also found that television was a major factor in the vocabulary enrichment of preschoolers and first-graders. He felt that this enrichment helped develop reading readiness skills. According to Schramm, children in the early primary grades were the heaviest viewers. He found that when children reached a certain age, they also reached a "saturation point" of television viewing. Children with above average mental ability (IQ of 115 or higher) reached this saturation point at about age 10, while those children of middle and lower intelligence groups reached the saturation point later.

Nancy Larrick (1978) felt that since reading and television viewing involve different functions of the brain, excessive television viewing interfered with school learning. Visually presented material, like watching television, is processed chiefly by the right side of the brain. Reading, writing, and complex verbal and mathematical activities involve the left side of the brain. Consequently, television trains students for right brain functioning, while schools gear programs for left brain learning. Larrick also maintained that television created passive children who were poor in questioning techniques.

In another study Larrick (1975) found that preschoolers and primary students who were heavy television viewers considered school irrelevant and books a waste of time. She found that these students were sound and picture oriented. Larrick also found that the attitude of parents toward reading greatly influenced their children's attitude toward reading. Positive attitudes of the parents were transferred to the children.

A study conducted by Jackie Busch (1978) included questions about parental reading and viewing habits, the power of television to stimulate reading, as well as the number of hours students viewed television in relation to their reading. Busch was interested in detecting possible changes since Schramm's study. Five hundred ninety-five

students in grades two through twelve in Stafford and King George's Counties of Virginia wereselected. Students reading abilities were determined through teacher evaluation and the California Achievement Test in Reading.

Busch interviewed an elementary librarian, three teachers, and an elementary school principal on the effects of television on reading readiness. The librarian felt that television helped increase the vocabulary of first graders. This supports Schramm's findings on the vocabulary development of preschoolers and first graders. Busch also found that heavy television viewers tended to be less patient in reading books that took more than a few minutes to complete.

Busch's study also revealed that second and third graders watched thirty to thirty-five hours of television a week. Busch felt that these statistics corroborated "Schramm's end conclusions, which stated that the better readers were also the heavier viewers". Students in grades four, five, and six watched the most television. Thirty percent of these students watched an average of fifty hours of television a week. When the findings were correlated with student ability, they indicated that the poorer the student's ability, the more television he/she watched. The lower ability student found reading "boring and tedious".

It was also found that parents supervised the television viewing of primary students more closely than any other age

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group. Fifty-seven percent of students in grades four, five, and six reported that they were permitted to watch television without parental supervision. A study conducted by Robyn Ridley (1983) confirmed that parents' supervision of television viewing was associated with higher IQ's and better student achievement as reflected by school grades.

Gross and Walsh (1980) also conducted a study to determine parental control over children's television viewing. One hundred families in the Los Angeles area were interviewed. The results of the study revealed that the most crucial variable was the number of television sets in the home. The children were allowed more control over the shows they watched and were allowed to watch more programs as the number of television sets in the household increased. Parents who viewed excessive amounts of television tended to have children who viewed excessive amounts of television. Gross and Walsh also found that parents had more control of the viewing habits of younger children, and that they exercised more control over girls' viewing habits than boys' viewing habits.

Busch (1978) felt that preschool and primary students benefited most from television viewing. Stories adapted for television were found to be stimulating. Fifty-seven percent of students in grades four, five, and six stated that a television story caused them to read a book (tie-in). High

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school students felt that television was an easy way of receiving information. Seventy-seven percent of the students interviewed, regardless of age, said that they would rather watch a story on television than read the same story in a book. However, eighty-nine percent of these same students had watched at least one program that caused them to read a book as a follow-up.

Hamilton (1976) also found that television can provide a stimulus for reading. He surveyed the reading habits of two hundred fifty-three seventh graders over a six week period. The students were given a choice of reading or not reading books related to television (TV tie-ins). Students reported reading twice as many television-related books as other books. Hamilton theorized that the appeal of the tie-in was because the reader recognized the pattern of the book and had the comfort of knowing how the story ended. Television related books became a pleasurable experience for children because there was little opportunity for them to fail. Hamilton concluded that reluctant readers may find television an incentive to reading.

In a 1978 study involving five hundred ninety-five Virginia students, grades 2-12, Pauline Gough confirmed that television had potential as a reading motivator. Eighty-nine percent of the students questioned had seen at least one television program that had prompted them to read a book.

Dorothy Singer (1979) suggests that television can be used to entice children to read. She suggested that teachers become more aware of books that are related to television subject matter.

Television networks want their audiences to know that there is a link between books and television. Prime time series such as "Little House on the Prairie", which appeals to a large, diverse audience, may motivate reading. John Cole, executive director of the Center of the Book, noted that "television-related books rarely gather dust on library shelves." Many viewers purchase books after watching a particular program. Shows like "Reading Rainbow" recommend several books viewers can read for additional information about the topic they have just explored. On "Storybreak" viewers are treated to part of a story and then told to read the rest of the story to find out what happens.

Instructional television (ITV) creates programs for classroom use and provides teachers with materials to enhance the viewing experience. Techniques similar to commercial television are used to arouse students' interest. Many ITV programs are designed to motivate a specific audience to read books about certain authors. Instructional television can be an effective aid to teaching, not a substitute for it. (Shoup 1984)

Splaine (1978) concurred that television has the potential for stimulating reading. Spaine conducted a survey of all library media specialists in Maryland. The questionnaire asked the library media specialists to list the five most popular books in their school libraries. They were also asked to speculate on the reasons for each title's popularity. The results showed that nine of the fifteen most popular books were tie-ins. Charlotte's Web headed the list. The other eight books, like Little House on the Prairie, had either been shown as a television program or a movie within the last three years. Splaine concluded that there is a relationship between television viewing and reading. Television can serve as a stimulation to reading because children see a program and then want to learn more about it.

Rosemary Lee Potter (1980) found that script reading, tie-in books and basic lessons were three ways schools could use television. Script reading motivated children to read while teaching them essential vocabulary, comprehension, and analysis skills. Tie-in books also motivated reading and provided material for teaching skills. Television based lessons were used to teach many other skills. Plot and characterization were studied through commercial programs. Other activities included advertisement analysis, producing commercials, monitoring news broadcasts and graphing the

results. Successful programs, such as critical viewing skills and television literacy packages could be used to turn television into an educational tool.

In another survey, Potter (1982) summarized how seven school districts used television programs for positive student growth. Television was used to sucessfully develop comprehension skills and identify main characters, conflict and plot. Students were required to evaluate and critique favorite programs in an effort to develop critical thinking. Potter stressed that many teachers were unaware of how to use television as an instructional tool.

Judith Stecher (1976) stated that television could be used as a stimulus for language expression. She felt that the more children know about television, the more they could use it as a source of information. Stecher suggested activities which incorporated language building skills. One activity was to encourage students to write fan letters to television personalities and notes to program sponsors either praising or criticizing shows. Other activities included utilizing scripts for vocabulary development, slang, and recognition of parts of speech, and visiting a local station to watch a show being produced.

Shorr (1978) came to the same conclusions. He felt that television awareness and coping skills should be taught at every grade level. Skills could either be taught as a

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separate subject or taught in the content areas. Shorr recommended that the following areas should be addressed. Students should become familiar with the symbols, grammar, and techniques of visual communication. Students should be assisted in the development of critical viewing skills, and students should be helped to understand television and the television industry.

Rankin and Roberts (1981) affirmed that educators should utilize television for student learning. They suggested that written skills could be taught by assigning essays about favorite programs. Another idea was for students to view programs without the sound and then create the dialogue. A unit on current and future job markets could be made by observing and listing the occupations of characters on various shows. Rankin and Roberts concluded that television provided an excellent means for developing analytical and evaluative skills.

Winnick and Wehrenberg (1982) felt that it was essential for educators to understand the role television plays in the development of children. They looked at specific age groups according to Piaget's stages of development and created activities for the pre-operational and concrete operational stages. The lessons were designed to help children become critical thinkers while watching television. Each lesson contained a format guide which included the following

information: Piagetian development stage; Piagetian operational function; curriculum area; proposed activity and its purpose; types of television programs suited to activity; materials needed; and activity directions. Parents were asked to become involved in the process.

Sally Steenland (1978) maintained that television education should be taught throughout the grades. She felt that "TV education is basic education; it enables individuals to have control over their lives and have impact on institutions in an increasingly complex technological world." Steenland stressed the importance of developing critical awareness in viewing television.

This review of literature has included studies which are varied in purpose, methodology, and analysis of data. The studies were conducted in different regions of the country and included suburban and urban areas. Varying age and grade levels, socioeconomic and educational levels of parents, and ability levels of students have been found among the studies reported.

Some studies support the idea that excessive television viewing has a negative impact on reading achievement. Among them is a study by Hornick (1975) who surveyed two thousand two hundred nine students to determine the relationship between television viewing and school achievement and intellectual growth. Basic reading skills tests, achievement

tests in content areas, and general ability tests were given semi-annually for two years. The scores were correlated with the television viewing habits of the subjects. Results showed that television viewing had no effect on achievement in the content areas, but that there was a negative relationship between television viewing and the growth of long-term reading skills and general ability development.

Other studies have found a low correlation between television viewing and reading difficulties. John Guthrie (1983) analyzed twenty-three studies from a number of nations. The studies contained two hundred seventy-seven correlations between different measures of achievement and different estimates of television viewing time. The median association between television viewing and achievement was -.06. This weak negative association should not adversely affect reading ability.

The evidence is not strong enough to conclusively support either theory. The inconsistencies and conflicting findings suggest the need for additional research. Television, however, has become an integral part of our society. Researchers do agree that children should be taught to be discriminating and critical viewers.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

Questionnaire Utilized in Survey

1. How many hours do you spend:

	Watching television?	Reading books?
Monday	_____	_____
Tuesday	_____	_____
Wednesday	_____	_____
Thursday	_____	_____
Friday	_____	_____
Saturday	_____	_____
Sunday	_____	_____
Monday	_____	_____
Tuesday	_____	_____
Wednesday	_____	_____
Thursday	_____	_____
Friday	_____	_____
Saturday	_____	_____
Sunday	_____	_____
Monday	_____	_____
Tuesday	_____	_____
Wednesday	_____	_____
Thursday	_____	_____
Friday	_____	_____
Saturday	_____	_____
Sunday	_____	_____

2. Would you rather:

   a. Read a book or _____
      watch television? _____

   b. Watch television or _____
      play Nintendo? _____

   c. Help your mother or _____
      watch television? _____

   d. Watch television or _____
      play with a friend? _____

3. Please list your three favorite television programs.

   _____

   _____

   _____

4. Please list your three favorite books.

   _____

   _____

   _____

Thank you for your cooperation.

APPENDIX B

Data Utilized in Study

Student Number	Reading Comp Scores	Avg Hours Spent Viewing TV
1	66	15
2	80	6
3	77	6
4	95	10
5	82	4
6	82	12
7	44	6
8	50	10
9	76	16
10	26	17
11	88	14
12	88	15
13	44	9